Draft Record of Decision

Gore Creek Restoration

Final Environmental Impact Statement

USDA Forest Service
Medicine Bow – Routt National Forests Thunder Basin NG
Yampa Ranger District
Grand and Routt Counties, Colorado

Introduction

This draft Record of Decision documents my decision regarding the Gore Creek Restoration Project as well as the rationale behind my decision. The decision described in this document is based on my review of the alternatives and analyses presented in the Gore Creek Restoration Draft and Final Environmental Impact Statements, additional project-related information in the Gore Creek Restoration project record, and public comments that I received regarding the project.

In addition to my decision and rationale, this document summarizes public involvement conducted for the project, the alternatives I considered, and findings required by law. It also identifies what I have determined to be the environmentally preferable alternative and explains measures I am taking to avoid or minimize environmental harm.

Background

The Mountain Pine Beetle began killing a large number of lodgepole pine trees in the early 2000's which led to multiple vegetation management assessments, including the Rock Creek Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), Red Dirt Environmental Assessment (EA) and Roadside Hazard Tree Removal EA being completed in the Gore and Red Dirt Geographic Areas.

During implementation of the vegetation management projects, areas outside the analysis areas, hereinafter referred to as 'areas outside NEPA boundaries', were harvested. Upon discovery, timber sale activity was suspended until all timber sale unit boundaries could be brought into compliance with the Rock Creek EIS and other NEPA documents. However, approximately 550 acres of harvest had been completed outside of the areas analyzed in previous National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) decisions. Due to resource concerns identified by an interdisciplinary team in areas harvested outside the NEPA boundaries it was determined that restoration was needed on landings, slash piles, temporary roads, skid trails, and steep slopes throughout the analysis area.

During implementation of the Rock Creek EIS timber sales, the Forest Service also discovered that the miles of temporary road built within the analysis area exceeded the amount that was analyzed in the NEPA document. Despite this overage, however, additional temporary roads were necessary to complete the sales analyzed in the 2006 Rock Creek EIS (USDA 2006). It was determined that approximately 5 miles of temporary road would be necessary to complete salvage harvest in Forest Products Management Areas (5.13) throughout the Rock Creek analysis area. The timber harvest prescriptions analyzed in this document for other management areas are not applicable now that the Mountain Pine Beetle epidemic has killed the majority of the lodgepole pine throughout this region.

Watershed impacts were noted in previous NEPA documents, which stated that road closure, decommissioning, relocation, reconstruction, and/or repair could be done to improve the watershed condition. More specific road decommissioning and reconstruction projects have been identified under this proposal on National Forest System Roads (NFSR) 185, 241, 242, and 246. In addition to the road projects, two dispersed campsites that are directly depositing sediment into Gore Creek have been identified for decommissioning. This would also improve watershed health.

Decision

This draft Record of Decision (ROD) documents my decision regarding actions I am authorizing under the Gore Creek Restoration project and the rationale for my decision. The Gore Greek Restoration purpose and need, as specified in the Gore Creek Restoration Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS), provides the focus of and scope for the proposed action and alternatives under the direction of the 1997 Revised Routt National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan. Forest Plan direction is summarized in Chapter 1 of the Gore Creek Restoration FEIS. Given the purpose and need, I have reviewed the alternatives and analysis disclosed in the FEIS, the issues identified during public scoping, information contained in the project record, Forest Plan direction, and public comments received on the draft EIS. Based on this review, I have decided to approve Alternative 2, the Proposed Action, and the

design criteria outlined below. The reasons for selecting Alternative 2 and associated design criteria are explained under Rationale for Selected Action, presented later in this ROD.

Specifics of Decision

The Yampa Ranger District of the Medicine Bow-Routt National Forests will rehabilitate areas that have resource concerns in the Gore Creek analysis area. This includes obliterating temporary roads, rehabilitating landings, burning or removing and rehabilitating piles, rehabilitating skid trails, and providing erosion control in areas that were harvested on steep slopes. The type of rehabilitation done will be dependent on many different factors, such as topography, soils, impacts to groundwater and surface water, and archeological impacts. These treatments could include full re-contouring of temporary roads, ripping, seeding, mulching, slash, and other erosion control as needed.

Watershed improvement projects will be completed on approximately 8 miles of road. This will include decommissioning 7 miles of system road and road restoration on 1 mile of non-system road. Culverts will be removed on perennial streams, and two dispersed campsites that are contributing sediment directly into Gore Creek will be decommissioned. Figure 2 (page 16) and Table 2 (page 11) in the FEIS identify where these activities are proposed.

Approximately 5 miles of the roads proposed for decommissioning are also a part of the Gore Pass bike trail system. This will result in these trails being closed and changed from loops to out and back trails.

Timber sales will be completed as described in the No Action alternative, using the existing road system. Road improvement would occur on approximately 1 mile of NFSR 241 at the northern end of the decommissioning project toward NFSR 243 (see Figure 2). This will be done by adding drainage and reducing gullying along this section of road.

Design Criteria and Monitoring

The ID team identified Design Criteria to reduce or prevent undesirable effects resulting from management activities. Design Criteria expand upon best management practices, watershed conservation practices, Forest Plan Standards and Guidelines, and other environmental protection measures to ensure the project meets all required laws and regulations. The following site specific Design Criteria were developed for restoration activities and road building under this project and are common to all action alternatives.

Botany/Fisheries/Wildlife

- If specific impacts from the alternatives to threatened, endangered, and Region 2 sensitive species (TES) or their habitats are identified, management may be adjusted as necessary to reduce those impacts through working with the biologists or botanists. Timing restrictions may also need to be applied. The TES species of interest include goshawks, raptors, pygmy shrews, amphibians, and rare plants.

Botany

- To avoid introduction of non-native species, clean all equipment, both Forest Service and private, before entering the project area. Equipment should be inspected prior to coming onto the Forest when it has been in areas of known noxious weed infestations or any unknown areas.
- Units not previously surveyed for R2 Sensitive and Species of Local Concern (SOLC) plant occurrences will be surveyed prior to sale.
- Any seed used in the project area will be tested for noxious and non-native seed according to the Guidelines for Revegetation for the Medicine Bow-Routt National Forests and Thunder Basin National Grasslands.

Heritage

- **Design Criteria**: Archaeological sites that were damaged during the implementation of past timber sales and pile burning will be manually rehabilitated to prevent additional resource damage and erosion under supervision of the District Archaeologist and in consultation with the Colorado State Historic Preservation Office.
- **Monitoring**: Monitoring of rehabilitation efforts and site stability will continue on an annual basis for three years until such time that the site is determined stable. If monitoring indicates site is not trending toward stabilization, then additional or alternative rehabilitation will be implemented under the direction of a professional archaeologist and consultation with the Colorado State Historic Preservation Officer.

Hydrology

- All USGS blue-line streams, wetlands, riparian areas, and specific crenulations identified during project layout will be designated as protected stream courses and considered streamside management zones unless determined otherwise by a hydrologist or soil scientist. Heavy equipment will not be allowed to operate in protected stream courses or streamside management zones except to do restoration work.
- Avoid operating mechanical equipment on sustained slopes steeper than 35 percent except to do rehabilitation work. A hydrologist or designated Forest Service representative will be present when equipment is operating.
- Avoid soil disturbing actions during periods of heavy rain or wet soils. Do not operate equipment when it results in rutting of soils.
- Winter operations can occur with a minimum of 1 foot of packed snow or 2 inches of frozen soil.
- Keep mechanical equipment 100 feet from developed spring sources.
- Locate vehicle service and fuel areas, chemical storage and use areas, and waste dumps on gentle upland sites. Mix, load, and clean on gentle upland sites. Dispose of chemicals and containers in State-certified disposal areas.
- Do not use berms/tank traps for permanent road closure adjacent to high-use arterial and collector roads. Use different sizes of rocks and boulders buried at least 1/3 in the ground for barriers instead of berms/tank traps in the immediate foreground of arterial and collector roads.

Lands

- Piles that are within the powerline right-of-way will not be burned and will be removed when feasible.

- Designate areas listed below as protected improvements on the Analysis Area Map to prevent damage through proposed activities. Require avoidance and/or restoration to full function of these protected improvements.
    a) Irrigation Ditches
    b) Fences
    c) Special Use Roads
    d) Powerline right-of-ways and access routes
    e) Water improvements and all associated structures
    f) Snotel and Weather Station Sites
- Allow access to permittees on roads and other access routes shown on the Analysis Area Map.

Soils

- Landings and adjoining burned pile surface soil materials will be examined (by a soil scientist or other trained forest personnel) for depth and degree of compaction and burning. Scarification should be done to the approximate depth of compaction and burning.

Rationale for Selected Action

A total of three alternatives, including the no action (Alternative 1), were analyzed in detail in the final EIS. Both action alternatives (2 and 3) addressed the need to rehabilitate roads, piles and skid trails, and addressed watershed improvement projects. The main difference between the action alternatives was how they addressed facilitating the removal of timber remaining under the 2006 Rock Creek EIS decision and associated temporary roads needed for that removal.

After reviewing the issues, the analysis, and public comments, I have selected Alternative 2, as summarized above and fully detailed in the FEIS (page 11). I feel that the Selected Action best meets the purpose and need for action and the objectives for management within the project area. It also responds well to the issues that were identified through the public review process and responds well to comments received.

In determining which alternative to select for this project, I first considered whether active management is appropriate in this project area at this time. After reviewing all materials related to this project, including the analysis documented in the Gore Creek Restoration FEIS, specialist reports, supporting documents, public input, and Forest Plan direction, I believe active treatment is appropriate and needed in the project area at this time.

Response of Alternative 2 to the Purpose and Need

As outlined in the FEIS (page 4), the purpose of the Proposed Action is to minimize the environmental impacts created outside of previously analyzed NEPA decisions, reduce current impacts associated with roads in the analysis area, and to complete salvage operations in some of the sales analyzed under the Rock Creek EIS in order to improve stand condition and facilitate forest regeneration. While Table 3 (page 21) in the FEIS compares the alternatives to the Purpose and Need, below I will elaborate further on each need identified in the Purpose and Need statement.

There is a need to:

- Address temporary roads and skid trails that were created outside of NEPA boundaries, concerns on steep slopes created during timber sale activities, and all landings and burn piles within the analysis area.

Through the development and analysis of Alternative 2, the interdisciplinary team identified recent and relevant methods to address current and potential damage from disturbances associated with vegetation management in both authorized and previously unauthorized areas. The final EIS, under its description of alternative 2 (page 11), outlines general guidelines for rehabilitating and decommissioning roads, temporary roads, skid trails, excavated skid trails, landings, steep slope harvests, and burn piles. These guidelines incorporate a number of best management practices and were developed through an interdisciplinary process. These guidelines carry forward into the design criteria in Chapter 2.

- Analyze effects of additional temporary and specified roads needed to complete a portion of the Rock Creek sales in order to remove dead lodgepole pine and expedite the regeneration process.

In Table 3 (page 21) of the final EIS, this need was broken into two parts: the need to reduce the effects of temporary road construction needed to finish the Rock Creek timber sales and the need to remove beetle killed and dying lodgepole pine and promote regeneration of timber to expedite the establishment of the next forest.

This decision allows for removal of 240 acres of the 600 remaining log-able acres in the Rock Creek FEIS decision. That leaves approximately 360 acres that will not be treated at this time because no new temporary roads are authorized in this decision. Alternative 2 does not best meet the need to remove beetle killed timber; however it does best meet the need to reduce the effects of temporary road construction. The main driver behind deciding between the two aspects of the need lies in the specialist input regarding hydrology.

The existing condition in the hydrology section takes into consideration a variety of vegetation management activities that have taken place in the analysis area since the beetle epidemic began. Power lines have been cleared, road hazards have been mitigated, and many of the sales under the Rock Creek EIS have been completed, and were logged at a heavier rate than initially planned for. The remaining timber removal that would need temporary roads for access is in areas that are at high risk for adverse cumulative watershed effects. Table 14 (page 52) is a simple display of the relative change in watershed effects by alternative. The risk of watershed damage that might occur from building new temporary roads for the sales shown on Figure 3 (page 44) is not warranted at this time.

- Improve watershed health through relocation and decommissioning of roads and dispersed campsites that are causing adverse impacts to stream networks.

Alternative 2 proposes watershed improvement projects on 8 miles of road and two dispersed campsites. There were concerns from three groups on our proposed road decommissioning:

Western Area Power Administration is concerned that closure of NFSR 241 will limit their access to their transmission power line. It is our belief that their best access for this line is on the remaining portion of

NFSRs 185 and 243. We have included a more detailed map in appendix B that shows this access. This concern is addressed fully in appendix A.

Colorado Parks and Wildlife believes that closure of some roads will inhibit hunting and fishing access and opportunities. These concerns are addressed in appendix A; we believe that the potential resource damage that could occur as a result of leaving these roads open to public use and the costs of bringing them back to standard warrants a change in their use status for motorized use, but would still allow foot and horse travel.

Randy Carmickle has many concerns with roads that are addressed fully in appendix A.

Alternative 2 best meets the Purpose and Need by addressing the greatest number of issues. Alternative 1 does not allow for restoration of damaged areas, and Alternative 3 reduces the net benefit of decommissioning roads by adding new temporary roads.

Response of Alternative 2 to Key Issues

There were 2 key issues identified by the Forest Service based on internal concerns and public scoping efforts. Table 4 in Chapter 2 of the final EIS has a quick, quantifiable comparison of the alternatives as they relate to the key issues. How the alternatives address the issues is explained in more detail below:

Issue 1 was the Temporary Road Issue:

There is a concern over the amount of temporary road already built and the cumulative effects of past and present harvesting and ground disturbance on other resources, including soils and watershed health. There is also a concern that building more temporary road will increase these impacts.

Indicators used to measure how effective alternatives would address the issue were:

- Miles of temporary road proposed
- Miles of temporary road that will be reclaimed.

Under the No Action Alternative, no temporary roads would be built or reclaimed. Past effects of ground disturbance would not be addressed, but no new ground disturbance would occur either.

Under Alternative 2, the proposed action, 3.2 miles of temporary road would be reclaimed with no new temporary road built. This means that there will be fewer acres available for timber harvest.

Alternative 3 allows for 5 miles of temporary road to be built to facilitate the removal of timber under Rock Creek EIS sales, and also incorporates the same 3.2 miles of temporary road reclamation identified in Alternative 2.

Alternative 2 best addresses concerns with increasing the amount of temporary road built in the analysis area by not building new temporary roads. The hydrology section in chapter 2 of the EIS shows that existing road densities after recent management activities have placed many watersheds at high risk of adverse cumulative watershed effects, and additional roads could place other watersheds in a similar situation.

Issue 2 was the Motorized Access Issue:

There is a concern that the road density in the area is larger than necessary, and that many roads provide access to the same general areas. There is also a concern that many of the roads are in poor condition, due to lack of maintenance, increasing sedimentation to the stream network and impacting watershed health. However, there is also a desire by the public for motorized access into the area.

Indicators used to measure how effective alternatives would address the issue were:

- Miles of road being decommissioned
- Road Density
- Cost of road maintenance

The No Action Alternative does not propose road decommissioning, so the costs of maintaining these roads still falls on the Forest Service. The estimates for maintaining these roads to an acceptable standard range from $3,525 a year for standard maintenance, to $19,388 for heavy reconstruction. Road density would not decrease, and multiple routes to some destinations would remain. Public access would remain the same.

Alternatives 2 and 3 would eliminate the need for road maintenance on the decommissioned portions of NFSRs 185 and 241. The road density would decrease, and multiple routes to the same destination would be eliminated. Watershed health issues would be addressed through the decommissioning. Approximately 6 miles of road would be closed to motorized access, but still open to the public for foot or horse travel.

In addressing this issue, I have to look at the current resource damage that is occurring and how to ensure that this damage does not continue or worsen. It would be simplest to close roads from terminus to terminus and not allow any motorized travel, but we have taken into consideration the multiple uses of the road system and have worked to keep those portions of the road that are sustainable and in a condition to be maintained to a standard that will minimize future resource concerns. As mentioned above and in the final EIS, this is a high density roaded area, and there are still many motorized opportunities available.

Reasons for Not Selecting Other Alternatives Considered

In addition to the selected action, I considered two other alternatives in detail. A brief summary of these alternatives along with my rationale for not selecting them is presented below. Further information on the alternatives can be found in Chapter 2 of the FEIS.

Alternative 1 – No Action

The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) requires study and use of the no action alternative as a basis for comparing the effects of the proposed action and other alternatives. This alternative assumes no implementation of any elements of the proposed action or other action alternatives.

Under this alternative, no restoration would occur and any resource damage that occurred outside of previously analyzed NEPA boundaries would be left in its current state. NFSR's 185, 241, 242, and 246 would not be decommissioned, culverts on perennial stream crossings would not be removed, and the two campsites along Gore Creek would remain in their current condition. 240 acres of timber could still be harvested under the Rock Creek EIS utilizing the current road system. Road maintenance issues would continue to be addressed as funding allows.

Moving forward under this No Action alternative would most likely lead to further resource damage and unnecessary costs to the Agency.

Alternative 3

Alternative 3 is similar to the selected alternative with the main exception that 5 miles of a mixture of temporary and specified road would be authorized to reach the remaining timber sales in the Rock Creek EIS. We would still like to remove the beetle killed timber identified in the Rock Creek EIS, however more temporary roads than were originally authorized in the Rock Creek EIS have been built, and this has led to many watersheds reaching or exceeding acceptable disturbance levels. This alternative would allow for repairing many of these roads, but these measures would not be adequate to offset damage caused by new temporary roads. I would like to reiterate here that harvesting 360 acres of timber would not have a large enough benefit to offset the potential watershed damage caused by the 5 new miles of temporary or specified road.

Public Involvement

Comments on the proposed action, potential concerns, and opportunities for managing the Gore Creek Restoration project area were solicited from members of the public, other public agencies, tribal governments, adjacent property owners, interest groups, and Forest Service specialists. Various methods were used to request comments, including:

- The Notice of Intent (NOI) was published in the Federal Register on April 11, 2012.
- A scoping period was provided for 30 days, ending on June 6, 2012.
- On July 9, 2013, a notice that the Draft EIS was available for review and comment was sent to 36 interested parties who responded to the scoping letter or otherwise expressed interest in the Gore Creek Restoration project.
- On July 14, 2013, a legal notice of opportunity to comment on the Draft EIS was posted in the newspaper of Record, the Steamboat Pilot & Today. A Notice of Availability was posted in the Federal Register on July 19, 2013.

The Environmentally Preferred Alternative

Disclosure of one or more environmentally preferable alternatives is required [Section 101 NEPA; 40 CFR 1505.2(b)]. The environmentally preferable alternative is not necessarily the alternative that will be implemented and it does not have to meet the underlying need for the project. It does, however, have to cause the least damage to the biological and physical environment and best protect, preserve, and enhance historical, cultural and natural resources. In the case of the Gore Creek Restoration project, I

have determined that Alternative 2 could be considered environmentally preferred, with the Selected Action providing the best balance between short-term impacts of management activities and long-term benefits to natural resources.

The No Action alternative (Alternative 1) would not provide for the restoration of resource damage that has occurred in the project area. Timber harvesting would continue regardless of alternative selected, since it was authorized under a different EIS.

Alternative 3, with additional temporary and specified roading, would result in more timber harvest and the for more adverse cumulative watershed effects due to increased road density. Although we feel comfortable that we can prevent and avoid resource damage caused by vegetative treatments, this alternative does impact more area and increases road density.

Legal Requirements, Regulation and Policy

Another aspect of the process for selecting an alternative is ensuring that the decision actions comply with all legal requirements and policy. The Selected Action meets the following legal requirements:

Federal Laws

The National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended

All identified historic properties will be managed in accordance with the NHPA, based on consultation with the Advisory Council for Historic Preservation (ACHP), the Colorado State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO), and interested parties. New sides discovered during operations will be protected. Any identified Traditional Cultural Properties considered eligible to the NHPA will be protected. Reference is made to the consultation with the Colorado State Historical Preservation Officer (SHPO) under State Law section below

The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), 1969

NEPA establishes the format and content requirements of environmental analysis and documentation. The process of preparing the Gore Creek Restoration DEIS, FEIS and ROD was completed in accordance with NEPA.

The Endangered Species Act, 1973

A Biological Evaluation and Biological Assessment (BEBA) has been prepared to document possible effects of any activities on endangered, threatened, proposed or sensitive species in the Gore Creek Restoration project area. This project has been designed in conjunction with the Southern Rockies Lynx Amendment and has been determined to be consistent with the Lynx Amendment. Therefore, the determination for the Proposed Action alternative is a "no effect" for the Canada lynx. No consultation with US Fish and Wildlife Service is necessary for a "no effect" determination. Consultation was initiated on greenback cutthroat trout with concurrence on a determination "may affect, but not likely to adversely affect.

Effects of the Gore Creek Restoration project on Region 2 Sensitive Species were analyzed and documented in the Wildlife and Fisheries BE and in the Botany BE, which are summarized in Chapter 3 of the FEIS. A determination was made that the proposed activities may have a "beneficial impact" on slender moonwort (*Botrychium lineare*), American marten, Northern goshawk, and pygmy shrew individuals. The proposed activities may have a "may adversely impact individuals, but not likely to result in a loss of viability in the Planning Area, nor cause a trend toward federal listing" for the boreal toad and northern leopard frog.

The Clean Water Act, 1982

The Selected Action will conform to the Clean Water Act as amended in 1982. This act establishes a non-degradation policy for all federally proposed projects. The Selected Action will improve overall water quality through a reduction in sediment, and therefore would not degrade water quality below standards set by the State of Colorado. This will be accomplished through planning, application, and monitoring of Forest Service Region 2 Watershed Conservation Practices and other design criteria of project activities.

Clean Air Act Amendments, 1977

The Selected Action will be implemented to meet the National Ambient Air Quality standards through avoidance of practices that degrade air quality below health and visibility standards.

The National Forest Management Act (NFMA) 1976, which amends the Forest and Rangeland Renewable Resources Planning Act (RPA) of 1974

All alternatives were developed to be in full compliance and consistent with NFMA as summarized below.

Consistency with the Land and Resource Management Plan

The NFMA law (16 U.S.C. 1604(i)) requires me to ensure that permits, contracts, cooperative agreements, and other activities carried out on the Routt National Forest are consistent with the Forest Plan. My decision is consistent with this direction in that:

- Planned activities will contribute to Forest Plan goals and objectives (FEIS, Chapter 1).
- I have reviewed the Routt National Forest Monitoring and Evaluation Report and Region 2 Management Indicator Species (MIS) guidance for projects. The effects of planned activities on MIS are consistent with the Forest Plan (FEIS, Chapter 3).
- Planned activities are consistent with management area direction (FEIS, Chapter 3).
- Planned activities comply with Forest Plan standards (FEIS, Chapter 3).

Consistency with the National Forest Management Act

The scope of analysis for a Forest Plan's Management Indicator Species (MIS) is determined by the Forest Plan's management direction, specifically, its standards and guidelines (Chapter II) and monitoring direction (Chapter IV).

The NFMA directs the Secretary of Agriculture to establish certain resource management guidelines included in the agency directives system. I find that the activities in this project decision comply with the NFMA law, as follows:

- Irreversible resource damage will not occur. The project will not cause irreversible resource damage, such as to soil productivity or watershed condition (FEIS, Chapter 3).

Consistency with Plan Direction—Forest Plan Objectives

The selected alternative is consistent with the direction in the Forest Plan because:

It meets Goal 1 (Forest Plan 1-2) – Ecosystem management on the Routt National Forest shall provide for multiple-use outputs and the habitats and processes necessary to maintain the biological diversity found on the Forest.

The Objectives that the alternative meets under Goal 1 include:

- Maintain Soil Productivity
- Improve water quality, channel stability, and aquatic habitat watersheds of concern and meet the anti-degradation clause of the Clean Water Act across the Forest.

Forest Plan Standards and Guidelines met with this project are outlined below:

Soils

Standards

1. Reclaim roads and other disturbed sites when use ends, as needed, to prevent resource damage (Routt Forest Plan page 1-6).
2. Manage land treatments to limit the sum of severely burned or detrimentally compacted, eroded, and displaced land to no more than 15 percent of any land unit (Routt Forest Plan page 1-6).

As mentioned in the FEIS (Page 65) this alternative would likely result in a net gain of soil health through restoration activities. Road decommissioning and implementation of soils design criteria (FEIS Page 18) will help meet these standards.

Water and Aquatic

Standards

2. Manage land treatments to conserve site moisture and to protect long-term stream health from damage by increased runoff (Routt Forest Plan page 1-6)
3. Manage land treatments to maintain enough organic ground cover in each land unit to prevent harmful increased runoff (Routt Forest Plan page 1-6).
4. In the water influence zone next to perennial and intermittent streams, lakes, and wetlands, allow only those land treatments that maintain or improve long-term stream health and riparian ecosystem condition (Routt Forest Plan page 1-6).

Benefits to hydrology and aquatic resources are outlined in detail in the FEIS Page 53. Design criteria are included (FEIS pages 17-18) that designate and protect stream courses, reduce soil rutting, protect spring sources, and minimize runoff.

Recreation-Dispersed Recreation

Standard

3. Only allow camping outside a 100-foot zone surrounding lakes and streams, unless otherwise designated (Routt Forest Plan page 1-18).

Closing two dispersed campsites along NFSR 243 that are directly inputting sediment into Gore Creek helps meet this standard.

Infrastructure-Travelways

Guideline

2. Obliterate, revegetate and slope to drain those system travelways which are no longer needed to achieve management objectives or where resource damage cannot be mitigated"(Routt Forest Plan page 1-23).

Decommissioning seven miles of road helps to meet this guideline. The interdisciplinary team has developed guidelines for rehabilitation and decommissioning (FEIS page 12) based on best management practices and field experience.

Biological Diversity

Standard

3. Use genetically local (at the sub-section level), native plant species for revegetation efforts where technically and economically feasible. Use weed-free seed mixtures. While native perennials are becoming established, non-native annuals or sterile perennial species may be used to prevent soil erosion. (Routt Forest Plan page 1-8).

Using design criteria (FEIS page 17) for botanical resources, all seeds used in the project area will be tested for noxious and non-native properties, which will help us meet this standard.

Threatened, Endangered, Sensitive Species, and Wildlife

Standards

7. Where newly discovered threatened, endangered, proposed, or sensitive species habitat is identified, conduct an analysis to determine if any adjustments in the Forest Plan are needed. (Routt Forest Plan page 1-14).
8. Manage activities to avoid disturbance to sensitive species which would result in a trend toward Federal listing or a loss of population viability. The protection will vary depending on the species, potential for disturbance, topography, location of important habitat components, and other pertinent factors. Give special attention during breeding, young rearing, and other times which are critical to survival of both flora and fauna (Routt Forest Plan page 1-14).
9. Avoid disturbing threatened, endangered, and proposed species (both flora and fauna) during breeding, young rearing, or at other times critical to survival by closing areas to activities. Exceptions may occur when individuals are adapted to human activity, or the activities are not considered a threat (Routt Forest Plan page 1-14).
   The following design criteria is in place for all activities associated with this analysis: If specific impacts from the alternatives to threatened, endangered, and Region 2 sensitive species (TES) or their habitats are identified, management may be adjusted as necessary to reduce those impacts through working with the biologists or botanists. Timing restrictions may also need to be applied. The TES species of interest include goshawks, raptors, pygmy shrews, amphibians, and rare plants.

Undesirable Species

Standard

2. Use only certified noxious weed free hay, seed, straw or other materials for feed or revegetation projects on the Forest (Routt Forest Plan page 1-16).

Using design criteria (FEIS page 17) for botanical resources, all seeds used in the project area will be tested for noxious and non-native properties, which will help us meet this standard.

State Law

Consultation with the Colorado State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO)

The Colorado Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation office and the Colorado SHPO have been consulted concerning the proposed activities in the Gore Creek Restoration project area. The SHPO concurred with our determination of “Adverse Effect”. The Advisory Council on Historic Preservation (ACHP) will be consulted about measures to protect significant archeological sites from adverse effects, should any be identified during project implementation.

Best Available Science

My decision is also based upon consideration of the best available science. I have reviewed the record and found it contains a thorough review of relevant scientific information and responsible opposing

views, and, where appropriate, acknowledges incomplete or unavailable information, scientific uncertainty and risk. Specifically, the extensive literature citations in specialist reports show that relevant literature has been reviewed and considered by resource specialists in preparation of this EIS. In addition, the record shows that all literature cited by the public during the comment period has been reviewed and considered by resource specialists on the Gore Creek Restoration IDT. Finally, resource specialists have acknowledged their use of the best science available to them in preparation of this EIS.

Administrative Review

This decision is subject to objection pursuant to Federal regulations at 36 CFR 218, "Project Level Pre-decisional Administrative Review Process." This project implements an existing land management plan and is not authorized by HFRA; it is subject to 36 CFR 218 subparts A and B. Objections, including attachments, must be in writing and filed (regular mail, fax, e-mail, hand-delivery, express delivery, or messenger service) with the Objection Reviewing Officer (36 CFR 218.8) within 45 days following the date of publication of a legal notice announcing the Opportunity to Object in the Steamboat Pilot. The publication date of the legal notice in the newspaper of record is the exclusive means for calculating the time to file an objection (36 CFR 218.5 (c)). Those wishing to object should not rely upon dates or timeframe information provided by any other source.

Objections will only be accepted from those who have previously submitted specific written comments during a designated opportunity for public comment (36 CFR 218.5(a)). Issues raised in objections must be based on previously submitted specific written comments regarding the proposed project or activity and attributed to the objector, unless the issue is based on new information that arose after the opportunities to comment (36 CFR 218.8 (c)). Objections must meet content requirements of 36 CFR 218.8(d) and include:

(1) Objector's name and address as defined in §218.2, with a telephone number, if available;

(2) Signature or other verification of authorship upon request (a scanned signature for electronic mail may be filed with the objection);

(3) When multiple names are listed on an objection, identification of the lead objector as defined in §218.2. Verification of the identity of the lead objector must be provided upon request or the reviewing officer will designate a lead objector as provided in §218.5(d);

(4) The name of the proposed project, the name and title of the responsible official, and the name(s) of the national forest(s) and/or ranger district(s) on which the proposed project will be implemented;

(5) A description of those aspects of the proposed project addressed by the objection, including specific issues related to the proposed project; if applicable, how the objector believes the environmental analysis or draft decision specifically violates law, regulation, or policy; suggested remedies that would resolve the objection; supporting reasons for the reviewing officer to consider; and

(6) A statement that demonstrates the connection between prior specific written comments on the particular proposed project or activity and the content of the objection, unless the objection concerns an issue that arose after the designated opportunity(ies) for comment (see paragraph (c) of this section).

The objection shall be sent to:

USDA Forest Service, Region 2
Rocky Mountain Region
Attn.: Objection Reviewing Officer
740 Simms Street
Golden, CO 80401-4720

Hours: Mon-Fri 8:00 a.m. – 4:30 p.m., excluding holidays
Fax: 303-275-5134
Email: appeals-rocky-mountain-regional-office@fs.fed.us
(Acceptable formats for electronic objections are: rtf, pdf, doc, or docx)

Objections, including names and addresses, will become part of the public record and may be released under the Freedom of Information Act.

Implementation Date

Implementation of activities under the selected alternative will occur under the authority of the Final Record of Decision (ROD); the Final ROD will be issued following the close of the Objection resolution period (§218.12(a)). If no objection is received, implementation of the decision may begin on, but not before, the 5th business day following the close of the objection filing period (36 CFR 218.12(c)(2)). If an objection is received, implementation may occur immediately following the close of the objection resolution period (36 CFR 218.12(a)).

Contact Person

For additional information concerning this decision or the Forest Service objection process, contact Jack Lewis, District Ranger, Yampa Ranger District, 300 Roselawn Avenue, Yampa, CO 80483.

Signed:

Signature reserved for final decision

JACK LEWIS
District Ranger, Yampa Ranger District